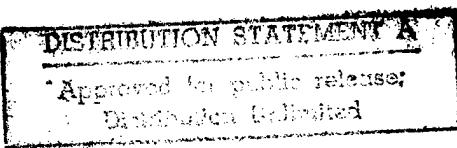


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ROGERS' RANGERS AND IRREGULAR COLONIAL WARFARE IN  
THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

by

James D.E. Went

History 402  
Advisor: Professor Cornelia Dayton  
University of Connecticut  
May 1998

## ROGERS' RANGERS AND IRREGULAR COLONIAL WARFARE IN THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

From a British or an American point of view, the history of the Seven Years' War in North America is a bipolar one, pitting British regular troops against provincial soldiers supplied by American colonies. Colonial historians know this history well, as it includes the rivalry between British and colonial soldiers that would contribute to the arrival and the outcome of the American Revolution. Because historians tend to study the Seven Years' War almost exclusively as a precursor to the American Revolution, they tend to focus solely on those aspects of the war that are relevant to the apparently more significant future event. Due to the nature of this type of scholarship, particular elements of the contest for North America between the English and the French that seemed important at the time become immaterial. The result is that some parts of the story either go untold or are left to be understood through myth and legend. A special and significant military force that participated in this war, Robert Rogers' Rangers, has suffered such a fate.

Robert Rogers' Rangers pose a problem for any historian who seeks to compare provincial troops to the regular British army during the Seven Years' War. The Rangers were primarily New Englanders who fought as part of the British army. Unlike most provincial soldiers, they were skilled frontiersmen and highly trained soldiers. They received their pay directly from Great

Britain and they earned more money than both provincial and regular troops. Unlike regular soldiers, they did not participate in the drill and ceremony that occurred in military camps and garrisons on a daily basis. Rogers' Rangers were on the periphery of the army and they served a unique purpose. Their primary function was to gather intelligence for British military commanders. They were especially valuable during the winter months when very little was ever accomplished. The Rangers were men upon whom British Generals Braddock, Loudoun, and Amherst relied heavily throughout the course of the war.

This is not to say that Rogers' Rangers were entirely successful. While they performed a task that few units were willing to attempt, the Rangers had their share of disasters and defeats. Their most vital service occurred prior to 1758, when irregular warfare dominated the North American scene. Rogers' Rangers may have been the most skillful irregular troops in the British army, but they were overmatched by a mixed French and Indian force that was much more adept in the art of bush fighting or wilderness warfare. When, in 1758, the face of battle in North America changed and adopted the look of European battlefield siege warfare, regular troops began to dominate the wilderness and irregular tactics became secondary, though never obsolete. Eventually Rogers' Rangers became a less significant part of the British army, performing menial tasks and participating in major battles only to pursue the fleeing enemy as they attempted to retreat. Still, high-ranking British

generals continued to hold the Rangers in high esteem, especially in comparison with disappointing provincial units.

The historiography that exists relating to Robert Rogers' Rangers is inconclusive. Robert Rogers himself published two-hundred pages of journals describing his unit's experiences during the Seven Years' War. Both the accuracy and the significance of these journals have been in question: historians have treated them with different amounts of caution and Rogers' Rangers have enjoyed and suffered diverging levels of attention. Nineteenth-century British historian Sir John W. Fortescue completely ignored Rogers' Rangers in his multi-volume History of the British Army. Meanwhile, celebrated American historian Francis Parkman lionized Rogers and painted a romantic picture of the Rangers' achievements in Montcalm and Wolfe. In recent years, Rogers' Rangers have received more critical attention. John Shy writes that "their performance was seldom all that could be desired" and they would have been useless were it not for the "extraordinary talents" of Rogers himself.<sup>1</sup> In Empire of Fortune, Francis Jennings took less than a single page to discredit Rogers' Rangers for being indiscriminate Indian killers used to satisfy British leaders' thirst for revenge.<sup>2</sup> None of these historians took the time to investigate the real story of Rogers' Rangers.

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<sup>1</sup>John Shy, Toward Lexington (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Jennings, Empire of Fortune (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), pp. 199-200.

Because of this severe disregard for the evidence surrounding the accomplishments of Rogers' Rangers, their story was left for the imaginative storytellers and fictional writers. Kenneth Roberts based his 1930s novel Northwest Passage on the life of Robert Rogers and dedicated the first half of his book to the Rangers' 1759 assault on the Abenaki Indians of St. Francis. While Roberts' novel was very popular and even became a movie, it also augmented a mythical vision of Robert Rogers that is easy to confuse with the real man. Finally, in the 1950s, the book-length history of Robert Rogers and his Rangers appeared. Harold McGill Jackson, a lieutenant-colonel in the Canadian Army, wrote Rogers' Rangers: A History. This study of the military unit and its impact on future military organization improved upon a problematic work by Burt Garfield Loescher, The History of Rogers' Rangers, but was primarily intended for an audience familiar with military tactics and principles of war. In the same decade, John R. Cuneo wrote the first and only existing biography of Robert Rogers, Robert Rogers of the Rangers. Of the three works, Cuneo's is the most widely accepted for its accuracy, despite the author's admiring attitude toward his subject.<sup>3</sup>

While Cuneo, Jackson, and Loescher provide detailed histories of Robert Rogers and his Rangers, they do not attempt to relate this military unit's history to the greater history of

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<sup>3</sup>Fort Ticonderoga Museum, which holds a large number of sources related to Rogers' Rangers, refers to Cuneo's book as "the starting point for any study of the Ranging Companies" in its compiled bibliography, "Robert Rogers and the Ranging Companies"; John Shy writes, "Rogers has received his scholarly due in the sympathetic but sound biography of John R. Cuneo," Toward Lexington, p. 129, n. 129.

the Seven Years' War in North America. Rogers' Rangers are important to some who seek to answer the question as to what the importance of the Seven Years' War was, but not to all who address this issue. Many historians simply insert Rogers' Rangers into their argument if it serves their purpose, or they ignore the unit if it does not. Rogers' Rangers, however, helped to determine the outcome of the war, affected the style in which the war was fought, and influenced the approach that British and French military commanders took during the course of the conflict. Rogers' Rangers were an irregular fighting force that excelled in wilderness warfare by employing guerrilla tactics. They held their ground against larger, better equipped French and Indian irregular forces in the early years of the Seven Years' War, before European-style battlefield siege warfare came to dominate the scene. Most importantly, Rogers' Rangers filled the position of intelligence gatherers for the British army throughout the course of the war, when no other group possessed the skills or knowledge of the wilderness necessary to conduct reconnaissance missions.

Rogers' Rangers' place within the context of the Seven Years' War in North America will become clearer in the following pages. The first section of this essay will provide an overview of the Rangers' participation in the war effort, beginning with the reason why the British army originally needed Rogers' Rangers. Section two will confront the problems a study of Robert Rogers poses due to confusion over how accurate stories of his heroism really are. This section will also address the issue

of whether it was Rogers' Rangers or only Robert Rogers who was truly important to the war effort. The third section will examine further the need for irregular forces and how Rogers' Rangers filled that role. Section four will explore the structure of the British army, with its combination of regular and provincial soldiers, and define Rogers' Rangers' place within the army and in relation to the other troops. Finally, the essay will conclude with a discussion of changes to the nature of war in 1758 and how these changes affected Rogers' Rangers. Rogers' Rangers adapted to the changes in style of warfare that took place and they would perform some function in every major event throughout the Seven Years' War.

#### THE STORY OF ROGERS' RANGERS

On 8 September 1755, French forces attacked a British camp under the command of Sir William Johnson at Lake George. Although the British were able to repel the attack, Mohawk Indians who were aiding the British suffered a number of casualties and decided to return to their home and abandon their British allies.<sup>4</sup> In the realm of intelligence gathering, Sir William Johnson was at a loss without the Mohawks, who had served as his eyes and ears in the early days of conflict with the French and their Indian allies. Johnson began to recruit non-Indian scouts to replace the Mohawks and fill the role of

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<sup>4</sup>Ian K. Steele, Betrayals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 71; John R. Cuneo, Robert Rogers of the Rangers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 21.

intelligence gatherers, but with little success. Early attempts by both provincial and regular soldiers to gather intelligence and participate in skirmishes with the French and their Indian allies failed miserably.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier that year, in July 1755, General Braddock, commander-in-chief of the British army in North America, had died in battle. The duties of commander-in-chief fell upon Massachusetts Governor William Shirley until Great Britain could choose Braddock's replacement. It was Johnson's task to provide Shirley with reports on French strength, but, without the Mohawks, he had no idea on how he might go about gathering information. Johnson found the answer he was looking for in New Hampshire frontiersman, Captain Robert Rogers.

Rogers' first important mission began at the end of September 1755 when Johnson ordered him to reconnoiter French forces at Fort Carillon.<sup>6</sup> Rogers led his New Hampshire regiment on a successful expedition and returned to Lake George with a full report of the enemy's position.<sup>7</sup> However, about the same time as Rogers' return from Carillon, Johnson received a second intelligence report from two Mohawk Indians who had decided to continue working for the British army. The two reports contradicted each other regarding the number and position of the French army, so Johnson had to decide whom to believe before sending his report to Shirley. Although Johnson supported

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<sup>5</sup>Steele, Betrayals, pp. 71-72.

<sup>6</sup>The French name for Fort Ticonderoga

<sup>7</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 24-25; Robert Rogers, Journals of Major Robert Rogers (London: J. Millan, 1765), pp. 1-4.

Rogers' findings over the Indians', his superiors in Albany believed the number of French that Rogers counted to be too high. Throughout October, Johnson sent other scouting parties to Fort Carillon in order to confirm Rogers' report, but no one else was able to get close enough to the fort to do so. This proved to Johnson that, regardless of Rogers' accuracy, he was the only soldier in the army who could get him any results. When the New Hampshire regiment's enlistment expired in October, Johnson asked Rogers to stay with him. Rogers, along with four or five of his men, decided to stay at the camp through the winter.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the winter of 1755-56, Robert Rogers led expeditions into enemy territory, gathered intelligence, ambushed enemy soldiers and Indians who strayed from their camps, and fought in minor skirmishes. Governor Shirley thought him to be important enough to the army that he decided to make Rogers a permanent captain of rangers. Rangers were a relatively new type of soldier at that time, the term only having existed in the colonies for about a decade. New York state had employed rangers to "range the woods" for protective purposes" in the 1740s, although it is difficult to determine who coined the term and what it meant to military leaders, besides Shirley, before 1756.<sup>9</sup>

Shirley ordered Rogers to Boston in March 1756 and there outlined the duties that Rogers' Rangers would carry out: "to make Discoveries of the proper Routes for our own Troops, procure Intelligence of the Enemy's Strength and Motions, destroy their

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<sup>8</sup>Sir William Johnson, The Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 2 (Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York, 1921), pp. 134, 170-71, 187, 292, 294-95, 300.

<sup>9</sup>Harold McGill Jackson, Rogers' Rangers: A History (The Author, 1953), pp. 7-8.

out Magazines and Settlements, pick up small Parties of their Battoes upon the Lakes, and keep them under continual Alarm...."<sup>10</sup> Shirley allowed Rogers to hand-pick sixty privates, three sergeants, an ensign, and two lieutenants. The officers were to receive the same amount of pay as regular British officers, the enlisted men to receive twice as much as provincial soldiers, and they were all to be paid directly from royal funds. Rogers recruited most of his men in New Hampshire, including his own brother Richard who served as one of the lieutenants. By spring he had formed his company of rangers and reported back to Sir William Johnson.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, news of Rogers' Rangers' successful harassment of French and Indian forces spread throughout the British army, the American colonies, and across the sea to Great Britain. Before the Earl of Loudoun took over commander-in-chief duties from William Shirley in July 1756, Shirley ordered the raising of three more companies of rangers in New England along with one company of fifty Stockbridge Indians, Christianized natives who were fighting for Great Britain.<sup>12</sup> The rangers were quickly becoming a vital part of the British army, and all rangers fell under the authority of Robert Rogers.

By the end of 1756, Rogers' Rangers had experienced nothing but success as intelligence gatherers and an irregular fighting force, but their luck was about to change. In their

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<sup>10</sup>From William Shirley, Correspondence of William Shirley, ed. Charles Henry Lincoln, 2 vol. (1912) and quoted in Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 33-35.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

first scouting expedition of the new year, originating at Fort William Henry in January 1757, a large French and Indian force from Fort Carillon ambushed the Rangers and defeated them in a battle fought on snowshoes. Rogers called for a retreat and left wounded men behind on the battlefield to face the grim reality of death or capture. Approximately twenty-six of Rogers' seventy-four men were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner. This was the Rangers' first major engagement and their first taste of defeat, but it would not be their last.<sup>13</sup>

Rogers' Rangers did not participate in another major engagement until 1758 and, until then, it was business as usual. As part of the British army, however, the rangers continued to grow. On 9 January 1758, Loudoun informed Rogers that he had decided to honor his recommendation for more rangers by forming five new companies: four companies of New England colonists and one of Mohegan Indians.<sup>14</sup> Despite the growth of the rangers and his subsequent increase in responsibility, the winter of 1758 was disastrous for Rogers. In March, Colonel Haviland ordered Rogers' Rangers to ambush the enemy at Crown Point. Starting out from Fort Edward, the Rangers traveled to Crown Point on snowshoes and waited for the opportune moment to attack. With one-hundred and eighty-one men, Rogers' Rangers ambushed an advanced guard of approximately one-hundred Indians and won easily, but the Rangers were soon overwhelmed by a large number of French and Indian troops that followed the advanced guard.

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<sup>13</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 45-51; Thomas Brown, A Plain Narrative (Boston: Fowle & Draper, 1760), pp. 3-11; Rogers, Journals, pp. 38-46.

<sup>14</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, p. 69; Rogers, Journals, pp. 75-76.

Rogers, himself, narrowly escaped and was actually thought to be dead by hopeful French leaders. Only fifty-four men returned from the disastrous expedition referred to as the Battle at Rogers' Rock.<sup>15</sup>

Although the new commander-in-chief, General Abercromby, promoted Robert Rogers to major one month after the Rogers' Rock episode, Rogers' Rangers became a much less vital element of the British fighting force in 1758. Although Rogers still commanded four ranger companies, one company of Stockbridge Indians, and one of the Connecticut Mohegans, their role had changed due to a greater number of regular soldiers that had arrived in North America to conduct the war. For the larger battles, Rogers' Rangers' duties included covering the British retreat during French victories<sup>16</sup> and pursuing the French retreat during British victories.<sup>17</sup> The only battle that Rogers' Rangers would ever fight again, on their own, occurred in the fall of 1759 when they raided the Abenaki Indians at St. Francis.

The history of Rogers' Rangers during the Seven Years' War in North America ends in the winter of 1760-61 when General Jeffery Amherst sent them into the west to spread word among the different Indian nations of French surrender and British victory. Although Rogers' personal history, as well as the history of rangers in North America, goes on from there, the history of Rogers' Rangers ends with French capitulation and Native American acceptance of British supremacy in North America. Rogers'

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<sup>15</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 74-79; Rogers, Journals, pp. 79-90.

<sup>16</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

Rangers' successes and failures do not tell much of the battlefield story of the Seven Years' War in North America. Their arrival did not constitute a turning point in the tide of war and they were never the determining factor in any major battle. The significance of Rogers' Rangers lies not in wins and losses, but in the roles they played, the tactics they used, and the place from which they came.

#### ROBERT ROGERS: MYTH VERSUS REALITY

Before concentrating on the rangers he commanded, one must come to grips with Robert Rogers himself and what he truly meant to the British army. It is difficult to separate fact from fiction when reading the evidence that exists regarding Rogers' amazing life. He was a career military man who seemed to think little upon the causes for which he was fighting. When the American Revolution began, Rogers offered his services to both the United States and to Great Britain and ended up fighting on the side of the British. This, along with his earlier court martial trial for treason against the British government,<sup>18</sup> makes him a rather unattractive figure to some patriotic writers of United States history.

Although Robert Rogers' personal values will always be in question, his impact as leader of an irregular fighting force is unmistakable. The stories that survive regarding the battles he

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<sup>18</sup>The case against Rogers was weak and the court cleared him of all charges in 1768. For trial transcript, see: David A. Armour, ed., Treason? At Michilimackinac (Mackinac Island, MI: Mackinac Island State Park Commission, 1967).

fought and skirmishes he participated in are extraordinary, even without the romanticism with which many have told them. Rogers' journals contain the formal reports he provided for his superior officers as well as letters he wrote and received. Rogers edited these himself before publishing the journals when he traveled to London in 1765. A London critic wrote the following review of Journals of Major Robert Rogers in 1766:

From the specimen of the work now before us, it appears that the accounts published by Major Rogers may be depended upon by the public; they are undoubtedly as authentic as they are important and necessary, to those who would acquire a thorough understanding of the nature and progress of the late military operations in North-America. The Author writes like an honest, a sensible, and a modest man; and he has given, throughout his whole conduct, undoubted proofs, that he is a brave and skillful officer.<sup>19</sup>

While the author of this review could not have had any point of reference to compare with Rogers' journals when praising their accuracy, he does point out their significance as an aid to understanding the Seven Years' War in North America. This seems to be something that many historians have forgotten over time. Despite the high probability that Rogers exaggerated in his journals, it is foolish to ignore them since they are a significant primary source from the time period.

The problem with the history of Robert Rogers is that those who admire him tend to exaggerate his skills and accomplishments, while those who despise him refuse to accept that he was the least bit remarkable. It began with Francis Parkman, who described Rogers as "ambitious and violent, yet able

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<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Mary Cochrane Rogers, Rogers' Rock, Lake George, March 13, 1758 (Derry, NH: 1917), p. 66.

in more ways than one, by no means uneducated, and so skilled in woodcraft, so energetic and resolute, that his services were invaluable."<sup>20</sup> Rogers' great-great-grand-daughter, Mary Cochrane Rogers, published her own book about him early in the twentieth-century. She focused on the Battle of Rogers' Rock but included an eclectic assortment of letters and excerpts in the volume. Her description of the Rogers' Rock incident reveals the fact that she did not comprehend the nature or objectives of warfare. She stated that the Rangers would have won were it not for their disadvantage in numbers and the fact that they were far from their base, an argument that many losing armies throughout world history can make. Her description of Robert Rogers' narrow escape from the French and Indians who pursued him is notable. According to Mary Cochrane, the French force singled Rogers out, as they knew him well, and chased him to the top of Bald Mountain.<sup>21</sup> Rogers threw away his knapsack, clothes, and commission, slid down the side of the mountain on his snowshoes to a frozen lake below, strapped on skates and, then, "glides over the vast white desert" to safety.<sup>22</sup>

Stories such as the one told by Mary Cochrane Rogers only serve to confuse historians. How can one analyze a historical figure if one cannot discern between fact and fiction? Many of the earliest accounts of Robert Rogers' life are of this nature. The best example of the controversy that exists surrounding the

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<sup>20</sup>Francis Parkman, Montcalm and Wolfe (New York: Atheneum, 1984), pp. 251-52.

<sup>21</sup>Renamed Rogers' Rock following the battle.

<sup>22</sup>Mary Cochrane Rogers, Rogers' Rock, pp. 1-6; To the best of my knowledge, this account of Rogers' escape appears in no other sources, not even his own journals.

life and exploits of Robert Rogers centers on a raid upon the St. Francis Indians in October 1759.

On 12 September 1759, while most of the British army was focused on an assault under General Wolfe at Quebec, General Jeffery Amherst ordered Robert Rogers' Rangers to attack and destroy a village of Abenaki Indians at St. Francis. In his orders to Rogers, Amherst wrote, "remember the barbarities committed by the enemy's Indian scoundrels on every occasion where they have had opportunities of showing their infamous cruelties toward his majesty's subjects. Take your revenge, but remember that, although the villains have promiscuously murdered women and children of all ages, it is my order that no women or children should be killed or hurt."<sup>23</sup> The news that the Abenakis had captured two British officers had prompted Amherst's orders; these orders were a secret to everyone except for those who were going to participate in the raid and Amherst himself.

On 13 September 1759, Robert Rogers' Rangers, a party of 220 men, began their 150 mile trek from Crown Point to St. Francis. They began their journey in whaleboats, but ten days later, while traveling on foot, the French found their whaleboats and destroyed them. Despite having discovered that Rogers' Rangers were in the area and moving toward St. Francis, French commander M. de Vaudreuil decided not to pursue them or warn the Abenakis of their approach, proving that St. Francis was of

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<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Caleb Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), p. 447 and Rogers, Journals, p. 145.

little importance to him in the context of the war effort.<sup>24</sup> When Rogers realized that his whaleboats had been discovered, cutting off his route to escape, he sent word back to Amherst to send provisions up the Connecticut River, just past Fort Number Four, to await the Rangers' arrival. Amherst complied with Rogers' request and dispatched Lieutenant Samuel Stevens to follow his instructions.<sup>25</sup>

At this point, details of the expedition become confusing and there is debate as to what exactly happened next. The night before the Rangers attacked St. Francis, some type of festival took place, although there is little agreement as to the reason for the festival. The Abenakis were either celebrating the return of warriors who had fought with the French,<sup>26</sup> the return of a hunting party, the seasonal harvest, or a wedding.<sup>27</sup> The second point of contention is whether or not the Abenakis received forewarning of the Ranger attack. Rogers believed that he achieved total surprise, as did his biographer Cuneo,<sup>28</sup> but Abenaki oral tradition disputes that belief. According to Abenaki oral history a Mohegan Indian, possibly a Ranger himself, snuck into the village and warned them of the attack the night before it happened. This allowed the St. Francis Indians to hide their women, children, and sick away from the village.<sup>29</sup> There

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<sup>24</sup>Abbé Maurault, "Abbé Maurault's Description of the Destruction of St. Francis," in Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, ed. Kenneth Roberts (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937), pp. 43-46.

<sup>25</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 100-05; Rogers, Journals, pp. 154-55.

<sup>26</sup>Maurault, Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Gordon M. Day, "Rogers' Raid in Indian Tradition," Historical New Hampshire (June 1962), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, p. 107; Rogers, Journals, p. 147.

<sup>29</sup>Day, "Rogers' Raid," pp. 9-13.

is little historical controversy over what happened the following day, however. At daybreak, Rogers' Rangers attacked and destroyed St. Francis, leaving only a few huts filled with corn still standing. The Rangers loaded up on provisions, looted the village, and began their journey to the rendezvous point on the Connecticut at the Wells River, near Fort Number Four.

A third point of contention regarding the St. Francis raid has to do with the number of Abenaki casualties. Rogers reported two-hundred dead while official French reports put the number at thirty.<sup>30</sup> While some Abenakis are sure to have escaped and the Rangers did take twenty prisoners, there is no way to ever know which report was closer to the truth.

Rogers' Rangers' retreat is difficult to describe as anything but disastrous. Surviving Abenakis decided to pursue the Rangers and were able to inflict casualties upon their ranks, although one particular account of the retreat disputes this.<sup>31</sup> Despite this account, historians from Cuneo to Parkman concede that enemy pursuers wreaked havoc on the Rangers, especially after Rogers decided they should split up and take different routes to the rendezvous point. One of the problems was that many Rangers had filled their knapsacks with pillage and plunder instead of corn. Some Rangers almost starved to death as they tried to subsist on roots and could not find any game to shoot. One group of Rangers, commanded by Lieutenant George Campbell,

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>"The 'Pennoyer Narrative' of Rogers' Retreat from St. Francis," in Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, pp. 49-54.

reportedly resorted to cannibalism.<sup>32</sup> The Rangers' irresponsible actions irritated Amherst after he received Rogers' report of the expedition: "I am sorry to see you have so many Men Missing; this will, I hope, be a Lesson to all other Partys to Secure Provisions and themselves, instead of Loading themselves with Plunder, by which they must be Lost, if an Enemy pursues."<sup>33</sup> Ranger reputation would suffer following this incident.

The disastrous retreat was not entirely the fault of Rangers themselves. Lieutenant Stevens, who was supposed to meet Rogers at the rendezvous point, failed to fulfill his duty. He was waiting at the agreed upon meeting place, but returned to Fort Number Four just hours before Rogers' arrival. Ranger morale evaporated when they realized that the provisions were not waiting for them. Rogers and three other men traveled the remaining distance to Fort Number Four, overcoming tremendous obstacles in order to complete the journey. Rogers then sent out search parties to find the remaining Rangers and bring them provisions. He even went out himself once he had regained some of his strength.<sup>34</sup> A few months later, Amherst approved a court martial for Lieutenant Stevens in which he was found guilty of Neglect of Duty for failing to remain at the rendezvous point until Rogers' arrived.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas Mante, "Rogers' Retreat from St. Francis, according to The History of the Late War in North America (1772)," in Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, pp. 57-58.

<sup>33</sup>Amherst to Rogers, 24 December 1759, in Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, pp. 111-114; Rogers, Journals, pp. 149-50, 155-58.

<sup>35</sup>"Court-martial of Lieutenant Stephens for Neglect of Duty in Connection with Major Rogers' Raid on St. Francis," in Northwest Passage, vol. 2: appendix, pp. 35-39.

From a strategic point of view, the St. Francis raid was meaningless. It neither aided nor detracted from the British war effort. It constituted a vengeful act that could only raise colonial morale and provide Amherst with peace of mind. For the dramatic life story of Robert Rogers, however, the raid was extremely important. His actions throughout the St. Francis expedition inspired Kenneth Roberts to write a stirring description of Rogers' determination and heroism in Northwest Passage. Controversy surrounding the St. Francis raid also provided Rogers' critics with ammunition to attack the credibility of his journals. In addition, Rogers proved, by carrying himself and a few others to safety, that he was a competent leader, but forty-nine of his Rangers never returned from St. Francis.<sup>36</sup> To Amherst and other British officers, this showed that the Rangers as a unit were not as capable as their leader, since they could not bring themselves home after separating from Rogers. Even though Rogers received accolades from Amherst for his actions during the course of the expedition, Ranger credibility suffered from their mistakes and they would never again lead this type of campaign.

From his amazing escape at Rogers' Rock to his remarkable return from St. Francis, Robert Rogers had lived an extraordinary life by 1760 and his legend grew when he traveled to London five years later to publish his journals. However, it was and still is easy to find faults in his character. Furthermore, it continues to be difficult to distinguish between myth and reality

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<sup>36</sup>Cuneo, Rogers of the Rangers, p. 114.

when studying Rogers' life. Many consider it a waste of time to do so, but there are reasons to look past the distracting exploits of Robert Rogers and discover the real history. Beyond Rogers' own, personal novelty as a historical figure lie his Rangers, a key to discovering the larger history of the Seven Years' War.

#### THE NECESSITY OF IRREGULAR FORCES

Because the St. Francis raid is famous despite being strategically nonsensical, it is easy to characterize the history of Rogers' Rangers using that particular raid and dismiss them as being inconsequential to the war effort. This mistake causes historians to overlook the significance of their presence within the British army during the early years of the conflict. Rogers' Rangers appeared at a time of need for British commanders. They provided a service that no other company of soldiers, regular or provincial, was willing to undertake. Were it not for Rogers' Rangers, the Seven Years' War in North America may have been lost well before it was ever won.

Before General Edward Braddock, commander-in-chief of the British army, died in battle in the summer of 1755, he was already asking different colonies and his British superiors for six companies of rangers.<sup>37</sup> Braddock's quartermaster general, Sir John St. Clair, had also been writing to Great Britain that,

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<sup>37</sup>Stanley Pargellis, ed., Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1936), p. 78.

"I wish we may be able to find people to form into two Companys of Rangers."<sup>38</sup> While at that time Mohawk Indians were filling the role of intelligence gatherers, there must already have been some disappointment with or uncertainty about their service.

Following the September attack on Sir William Johnson near Lake George, when his Mohawk allies decided to desert him, the British army in North America was in trouble. Fort Edward was not yet built, so Johnson's forces had to camp on the southern border of Lake George where they were vulnerable to attack. His forces consisted of approximately 3,000 provincial soldiers and 300 Indians, most carrying their own rifles, and none wearing uniforms. His troops were untrained and Johnson himself was a young and inexperienced officer.<sup>39</sup> They were lucky to have held their ground against the French early in September, but now Johnson was isolated and blind to any French activity that was going on around him. He could not expect any help from a British command in Albany that was in disarray since the death of their commander. Johnson had to find the answer to his problems within the corps of provincials whom he saw everyday.

Robert Rogers was a savior to Sir William Johnson in the fall and winter of 1755-56. Although his intelligence inspired controversy in the beginning, Johnson stood by "Capt. Rodgers the most active officer in this Army."<sup>40</sup> Johnson defended Rogers in letters to his superiors and to his fellow officers, many of whom

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>39</sup>J.W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, vol. 2 (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1935), pp. 288-90.

<sup>40</sup>Johnson to Sir Charles Hardy, 31 October 1755, in Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 2, p. 258.

seemed skeptical that a provincial officer could have so much potential. In one particular letter, Johnson wrote the following description of Rogers:

I have mentioned Capt. Rodgers more particularly as I have Understood some Insinuations have been made to his Disadvantage I believe him to be as brave & as honest a Man as any I have equal knowledge of, & both myself & all the Army are convinced that he has distinguished himself since he has been among us, superior to most, inferior to none of his Rank in these Troops.<sup>41</sup>

Johnson needed Rogers badly, especially during winter operations when only a small force inhabited his camp and fended off the French. The mistrust of Rogers by Johnson's superiors is inexplicable yet unmistakable.<sup>42</sup> Johnson's aid-de-camp, Peter Wraxall, wrote Johnson from Albany that the "Councils of War" had declared: "Capt. Rodgers' Intelligence from Tionderogo, not to be depended on, should send again & again to be confirmed in the Truth of it--I told 'em I did not believe there was another Man in the Army woud go, *try if there is not*, was replyed."<sup>43</sup> Unhappy with Rogers' report of numbers, high-ranking British officers attempted to discredit him, but, thanks to Johnson's continued support, Shirley became convinced that Rogers was the right man to raise the first company of rangers. British officers, who had been begging for rangers since the beginning of the war, finally got their wish.

The Earl of Loudoun filled the position of British commander-in-chief in North America from July 1756 until

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<sup>41</sup>Johnson to Hardy, 13 October 1755, in Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 2, p. 190.

<sup>42</sup>Despite evidence that certain British officers did not trust Rogers' intelligence, Johnson's papers do not reveal exactly why this was so.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Wraxall to Johnson, 3 October 1755, in Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 2, p. 134.

December 1757. Throughout his service, Rogers' Rangers served Loudoun as the only companies of irregular soldiers in the entire army. Loudoun may not have liked the Rangers, for he complained of them causing him problems regarding discipline, but he could never have done without them.<sup>44</sup> In a letter Loudoun sent back to Great Britain in August 1756 he wrote, "When I arrived, I found there was a disposition in the Soldiers, to go out with Indians and *Rangers*, and that some of them were then out; I shall encourage it all I can, and if the parties that are now out, have success and escape, we shall soon get a knowledge of this Country, and be able to March with much more safety than at present."<sup>45</sup> Rogers' Rangers inspired other soldiers to venture from the fort and were a key to learning the area as well as the position of the enemy. Regardless of how Loudoun may have thought of the Rangers, he swore by them. Loudoun continued to plead for the "breeding up" of more Rangers throughout his career in North America and he sent them out on expeditions constantly.<sup>46</sup>

Rogers' Rangers were unlike any other troops in the British army. British regulars were amazed at the way in which they dressed and armed themselves:

...these light troops have, at present, no particular uniform, only they wear their cloaths short, and are armed with a firelock, tomahock, or small hatchet, and a scalping knife; a bullock's horn full of powder hangs under their right arm, by a belt from the left shoulder; and a leathern, or seal's skin bag, buckled round their waist, which hangs

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<sup>44</sup>Stanley Pargellis, Lord Loudoun in North America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 303-4.

<sup>45</sup>Loudoun to Cumberland, 20 August 1756, in Pargellis, Military Affairs, p. 224.

<sup>46</sup>Pargellis, Military Affairs, pp. 233, 269, 279, 315, 371.

down before, contains bullets, and a smaller shot, of the size of full-grown peas: six or seven of which, with a ball, they generally load; and their Officers usually carry a small compass fixed in the bottoms of their powder-horns, by which to direct them, when they happen to lose themselves in the woods.<sup>47</sup>

While their appearance was unique, it was their tactics that were most astounding. Robert Rogers himself authored a manual on how to conduct irregular warfare that he gave to his Rangers as well as his superiors.<sup>48</sup> Some of the more unusual rules for conducting expeditions included marching single file, enough distance away from each other "as to prevent one shot from killing two men," and keeping "one half of your whole party awake alternately through the night" rather than just a few men to stand guard. Rogers placed great emphasis on moving silently, traveling at night when possible, and always taking tremendous caution to protect against ambush. He showed that he did not fear attacking an enemy of greater numbers as long as the Rangers maintained the element of surprise and attacked at night. He feared travel on open roads or banks of water bodies that would leave them in plain view of a watching enemy. Finally, Rogers showed that he was a patient soldier: he advised that a Ranger force should remain hidden during all daylight hours when nearing the enemy and the possibility of being discovered was great.

It is possible that Robert Rogers' rules and bush fighting tactics constituted the first irregular warfare manual in English or European military history, but this is difficult to

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<sup>47</sup>John Knox, Capt., Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the Years 1757, 1758, 1759 and 1760, Arthur G. Doughty, ed., vol. 1 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), p. 34.

<sup>48</sup>Rogers, Journals, pp. 60-70.

determine. One twentieth-century historian believes Rogers' rules to be "invaluable" and that, "this, together with the narrative [Rogers' journals], provided officers with a very clear impression of ranging tactics and of the intelligence value of the ranging service...any officer reading them would profit greatly should he be assigned to *petite guerre* duties."<sup>49</sup> While Rogers may have been the first to write them down, however, his tactics were not innovative. Rogers, through his manual, and his Rangers, through their successes, showed that they understood Native American methods of bush fighting. In a book he published in London at the same time as his journals, A Concise Account of North America, Rogers showed that he had studied not only Indian methods and tactics, but also their reasons and goals for fighting battles and the ceremony that was part of their warring efforts.<sup>50</sup>

One of the more significant aspects of Indian warfare that Rogers pointed out in A Concise Account was their adaptability: "The Indians have no stated rules of discipline, or fixed methods of prosecuting a war; they make their attacks in as many different ways as there are occasions on which they make them."<sup>51</sup> While in his writing Rogers grouped all Indian tribes together and showed that he considered himself superior to these Indian "savages," he also understood and admired their ability to

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<sup>49</sup>J.A. Houlding, Fit For Service (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 222.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Rogers, A Concise Account of North America (New York: S.R. Publishers Limited, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), pp. 219-31. This is a book Rogers wrote in London, 1765 in order to prove that he possessed a broad knowledge of North America. He wanted to obtain a governor's commission for a western outpost from the British government. Rogers was successful and became the governor of Michilimackinac upon his return to North America.

<sup>51</sup>Rogers, A Concise Account, p. 229.

adapt. One historian has pointed out that, "Indian war, like European war, changed with time and circumstance. The guerrilla raids of small war parties became more common after the introduction of firearms made massed attack suicidal."<sup>52</sup> Rogers was not a proponent of mass frontal attack either and he acknowledged the importance of changes North American Indians made in their methods of warfare. Rogers was a student of irregular warfare and his Rangers practiced what he preached. He may not have liked or admired the Indian enemies he fought against, but he respected their ability to wage war in the wilderness.

While Rogers' Rangers were vital to the survival of the British army in the early days of the Seven Years' War, they were no match for French irregular forces. There were many reasons for this. Many French had been living with Indians for years, gaining knowledge of the wilderness, and learning from their Indian allies' ability to live off the land.<sup>53</sup> A second reason was that the king of France spared no expense in supplying his irregular forces. One particular group of 1,500 soldiers was supplied with an incredible amount of winter gear in 1757 that included moccasins, leggings, blankets, tomahawks, knives, snowshoes, skates, and provisions.<sup>54</sup> Also, France's Indian allies were more disciplined than British leaders suspected. While some men, including Rogers, respected Indian fighting

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<sup>52</sup>Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 165-66.

<sup>53</sup>Richard A. Preston, Herman O. Werner, and Sydney F. Wise, Men in Arms (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1956), p. 166.

<sup>54</sup>Steele, Betrayals, p. 76.

ability, many British officers believed that "properly led troops should rather easily disperse hostile Indians."<sup>55</sup> Even with Rogers' Rangers, the British army lost many battles and skirmishes to French and Indian irregular forces.

Both Sir William Johnson and Lord Loudoun, who had nothing but praise for Rogers' Rangers while they led their troops into battle during the early part of the war, understood that they were at a disadvantage. In a letter he wrote to William Shirley on 22 April 1756, Sir William Johnson stated:

It is true the French do more with their Indians than we can do with ours, and Many Reasons might be assigned for it. besides that they have many more Indians than we have--in most of their Scalping Parties there are more French than Indians wch. makes their Indians more willing & ready to go out, ours are left to themselves, & Indians are not so well pleased when they act as Auxillaries as they now look upon themselves to be, When this fatiguing & Dangerous Duty is left to them only.<sup>56</sup>

While Johnson concerned himself with the problems that a lack of Indian allies posed for him, Loudoun was afraid even to consider an offensive without improving upon his irregular forces. In a letter sent back to Great Britain in October 1756, he wrote:

I can give you no certain Accounts of the Road to Tien-deroga, as it has never been reconoitred properly, but by all the Accounts I have been able to get, it is not to be done with Troops whilst the Enemy are so superior in Irregulars, for in reality we have none but our Rangers. Before winter is over, if they do not drive us from the Forts, I shall be able to give you an Account with more Certainty.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Leroy V. Eid, "'National' War Among Indians of Northeastern North America," Canadian Review of American Studies (Summer 1985), p. 126.

<sup>56</sup>Johnson, The Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 9, pp. 437-38.

<sup>57</sup>In Pargellis, Military Affairs, p. 237

The prospects for British campaigns from 1755-57 were bleak because of their forced reliance on Rogers' Rangers to maintain all irregular activity. Native Americans were better bush fighters than European and colonial soldiers. That is why Rogers studied and copied their tactics. This did not diminish the importance of Rogers' Rangers, rather it established their importance to British commanders. The Rangers allowed Great Britain to survive the early years of the Seven Years' War when its regular forces were so weak. The war, however, was gradually changing and Rogers' Rangers' place within the British army would soon be reevaluated.

#### IN BETWEEN PROVINCIAL AND REGULAR SOLDIERS

The fact that some colonial American historians ignore Rogers' Rangers shows that they continue to group the Rangers together with either provincials or regulars, although certain characteristics of the Rangers separate them from both groups. Robert Rogers and those men who made up his ranging companies actually began their military careers as provincial soldiers from New England, but many already possessed fighting skills that set them apart from most provincials. When the Rangers began to receive their salaries directly from the Royal Treasury, they moved closer to the status of regular soldiers than provincials, but they were never truly accepted as a regular part of the British army.

Provincial soldiers were not all sharpshooting frontiersmen who were born to fight in the wilderness, despite some perception that this was the case. The "legend of the omnipresent frontier marksman" in the British colonies was just that: a legend.<sup>58</sup> Many of the farmers and artisans from New England who joined the ranks of soldiers throughout the Seven Years' War were not very handy with a rifle or musket. This is not to say that none of them knew how to fire a weapon, for that was not the case either since some had served in colonial militias. Formal military training experience, however, was a rarity among the men who came to fight alongside the British army.<sup>59</sup>

While military knowledge was lacking among provincial soldiers, British commanders did little to rectify the situation. In one instance, provincial soldiers from Massachusetts had eight days to train between the time they arrived in camp until they began the march to their first battle.<sup>60</sup> Having never been in a war before, the experience must have been a gruesome one for provincial soldiers fighting their first battle. At the end of many battles, "the soldiers responded with a widespread depression," regardless of the outcome.<sup>61</sup> The occurrence of death in battle was enough to shock anyone and these ill-trained soldiers were experiencing it for the first time.

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<sup>58</sup>Robert L. O'Connell, Of Arms and Men (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 172.

<sup>59</sup>Fred Anderson, A People's Army (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), pp. 74-83.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

British commanders had little patience for provincial soldiers whom they considered incompetent. General Amherst thought them to be unbearably lazy, for he wrote, "if left to themselves [Provincials] would eat fryed Pork and lay in their tents all day long."<sup>62</sup> Lord Loudoun thought so poorly of the provincials that, when submitting his plan for the campaign of 1757 and creating a force to send into enemy territory, he wrote, "My Plan for the Provincial Troops, is not to take many of them, and if I can manage that Point, so as to have all those from *New England* as *Rangers*."<sup>63</sup> Eventually, British commanders relegated the provincial soldiers to performing menial tasks and backbreaking manual labor within the forts.<sup>64</sup>

While provincial soldiers were an untapped resource and endured incredible hardships at the hands of impatient British commanders, Rogers' Rangers were always in demand. They not only performed well for colonists, but they possessed skills and training that regular soldiers did not possess themselves. This fact must not have gone over well with British officers, however, for they eventually tried to replace the Rangers with a new light infantry unit. The Rangers began to serve in a different capacity in the later years of the war: they became instructors. Regular British officers went out on expeditions with the Rangers and attempted to learn their tactics and methods. In December 1757, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage proposed the organization of

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<sup>62</sup>Jeffery Amherst, The Journal of Jeffery Amherst, ed. J. Clarence Webster (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1931), p. 167.

<sup>63</sup>In Pargellis, Military Affairs, p. 279.

<sup>64</sup>John Shy, A People Numerous & Armed (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 31-32.

a light infantry regiment in an attempt to gain promotion. Gage's superiors approved of his idea and the Rangers began to instruct his light infantry soldiers on how to use irregular tactics.<sup>65</sup>

The formation of Gage's light infantry unit raises many questions with regard to Rogers' Rangers. It seems peculiar that, even as British commanders begged and pleaded for more Rangers to fight in their army, they also sought to replace them. While these actions appear to be contradictory, they were actually a product of British officers' attitudes toward all colonists and provincials.

Rogers' Rangers were not the most successful military unit that ever fought in a war, but they were competent enough to hold their own against a stronger force of French and Indian irregulars. Their value to the British army proved to British commanders that a permanent change had to take place. There was no equivalent of Rogers' Rangers or any type of irregular force permanently attached to the British army. James Prevost, a Frenchman who fought for the British during the Seven Years' War, observed that soldiers who were to fight successfully in North America had to be of a completely different nature than any of those who fought in European regiments.<sup>66</sup> British commanders came to agree with his observation such that they wanted to form their own group of European soldiers who could fight in this new

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<sup>65</sup>Knox, Historical Journal, vol. 2, p. 312; Pargellis, Military Affairs, p. 255; Johnson, Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol. 10, p. 101; Pargellis, Loudoun in North America, p. 305.

<sup>66</sup>In Pargellis, Military Affairs, p. 337.

environment. When Thomas Gage volunteered to undertake this task, his superiors jumped at the opportunity.

This, however, could not have been the only explanation for the commitment to a new light infantry unit. The Rangers were growing in numbers over time and soon constituted a very large force of irregular soldiers. At one point Robert Rogers commanded nearly 1,000 soldiers and other rangers served outside his command.<sup>67</sup> An attempt to raise a brand new type of military unit, in the middle of a war, far away from home, under a commander who knew little or nothing about irregular warfare, when a colonial led force already performed the same function with success hardly seems reasonable. Some historians believe that the Rangers were causing problems for British commanders, and there is some truth to this statement. In November 1757, a group of Rangers on a scouting expedition without Rogers refused to listen to a British officer who accompanied them. This led to a botched ambush and criticism of the Rangers by British commanders. The incident seemed to confirm their belief that, without Rogers, the Rangers were useless. Later that month, after two Rangers were whipped for stealing rum, the two men and their fellow Rangers decided to chop down the whipping post and they caused a riot. The incident damaged Ranger reputation even further and, one month later, Gage received approval for his light infantry unit.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jake T. Hubbard, "Americans as Guerrilla Fighters: Robert Rogers and His Rangers," *American Heritage* (August 1971), p. 84.

<sup>68</sup> Cuneo, *Rangers of the Rangers*, pp. 61-65.

Despite the need for Rangers as scouts, British military commanders never could stomach Ranger methods and tactics of fighting. The practice of scalping, common to the Rangers who saw it only as payback for their Indian enemies who had always done it themselves, seemed inhumane to many British officers. In one particular incident, some Rangers were accused of taking French scalps and pretending they were Indian in order to collect a bounty.<sup>69</sup> While the story may or may not have been true, it also caused Ranger reputation to suffer. In 1759, after taking two children prisoner, a party of Rangers decided to murder the children rather than let them go free. The incident caused one British observer to write, "this barbarous action proceeded from that cowardice and barbarity which seems so natural to a native of America, whether of Indian or European extraction."<sup>70</sup> Although such practices were sometimes necessary and performed by bush fighters on either side, British soldiers never understood them and they condemned colonial rangers for their actions.

British officers never could bring themselves to completely trust a group of colonial soldiers. Despite the Rangers' value to the British army and the success of many of their scouting parties, Rogers' Rangers received criticism for their methods and occasional breaches of discipline. While British commanders from Johnson to Amherst desired as many rangers as the crown was willing to pay for, they only offered praise to Rogers as their leader and never to his troops. The

<sup>69</sup>Knox, *Historical Journal*, vol. 1, pp. 196-97.

<sup>70</sup>From *Fraser's Journal: Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, Historical Documents (Second Series)* and quoted in Knox, *Historical Journal*, vol. 1, pp. 409-10.

commanders' decision to design a light infantry force, which they felt would be a more humane and disciplined replica of the Rangers, shows that they never could get past the stereotype they had fixed upon all colonists and provincials, regardless of their value to the army. In the end, however, permanent light infantry corps were not raised within the British army until 1771, and the first specialized schooling of these soldiers did not occur until 1774. Although light infantry companies did participate in the Seven Years' War, they did not have a major impact on the British army and its methods of fighting until much later.<sup>71</sup>

There is no doubt that the creation of the first light infantry unit in the British army had a profound influence on the future of warfare, but this must not be confused with the impact Gage's new unit had on the Seven Years' War. The birth of light infantry units prompted one historian to write that "the importance of this move in the history of irregular warfare is very great; it was the natural and inevitable outcome of the failure of the provincial rangers to fulfill the function of acting as irregular troops."<sup>72</sup> An admirer of Rogers' Rangers disagrees, for he writes, "the New Hampshireman's Rangers had time and again outperformed the British Army's corps of 'light infantry'."<sup>73</sup> Both opinions seem inconsequential. The Rangers did fulfill the function of acting as irregular troops and they were not in competition with the light infantry. In the end, the light infantry never came to play a significant role in the war

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<sup>71</sup>Houlding, Fit For Service, p. 251.

<sup>72</sup>Pargellis, Loudoun in North America, p. 305.

<sup>73</sup>Hubbard, "Americans as Guerrilla Fighters," p. 85.

effort and Rogers' Rangers became relatively insignificant themselves after 1757.

Rogers' Rangers were unique to the Seven Years' War because they did not fit into a well-defined category. British commanders never truly understood what the Rangers meant to their army. They knew they needed the Rangers, but they were uncomfortable relying so heavily upon a colonial force when they had so much contempt for provincials. While Rogers' Rangers filled a void for these British commanders, they never did achieve the amount of respect they may have deserved.

#### FROM THE WILDERNESS TO THE BATTLEFIELD

The nature of warfare in the Seven Years' War in North America evolved as the conflict progressed. At the beginning of the war, both the British and the French relied heavily upon irregular forces, but by 1758 the British had 20,000 regular soldiers in North America.<sup>74</sup> Bush fighting and irregular tactics gave way to siege warfare conducted by European battlefield strategists. Irregular forces had kept the British in the war, but regular soldiers would win it.

After 1758, Rogers' Rangers were no longer as valuable to the British army as they had been before. They shared scouting duties with Gage's light infantry, but there were not always enough important missions to go around. Rangers undertook

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<sup>74</sup>Preston et al., *Men in Arms*, p. 168.

alternate duties such as chopping wood, building and renovating forts, stealing cattle and hogs, and destroying French and Indian harvests.<sup>75</sup> Rangers were present in every major battle, however, serving to reconnoiter enemy position prior to attack and pursue a retreating enemy following British victories. Their role had definitely changed, for "their main assignment was to provide a protective screen for regulars in wilderness situations, a task that was incompatible with guerrilla warfare."<sup>76</sup> Rogers' Rangers no longer attacked the enemy on their own and did not feel that they were significant contributors to the war effort anymore. One Ranger officer summed up the mixed feelings of his men when he said, "my fellows feel bold at the repeated success of the regulars, and wish for an opportunity to distinguish themselves in like manner."<sup>77</sup> This may have been one reason why General Amherst decided to send Rogers' Rangers on the bloody, yet meaningless, raid against the St. Francis Indians.

Great Britain won the Seven Years' War in North America because it employed a large army of regular soldiers, not because it improved its irregular fighting forces. The French lost on battlefields, such as those that existed in Europe, and because they could not defend their forts against the British. They did not lose the war in the wilderness where mastery of irregular tactics determined the victor. Those who seek to find major battles in which irregular fighting forces determined the outcome will be disappointed. French and Indian irregular soldiers did

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<sup>75</sup>Knox, Historical Journal, vol. 1, pp. 289, 377; vol. 2, pp. 35, 56.

<sup>76</sup>Ian K. Steele, Warpaths (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 222.

<sup>77</sup>Knox, Historical Journal, vol. 2, p. 339.

not win any significant battles during the Seven Years' War and neither did Rogers' Rangers.

Although Rogers' Rangers did not win any battles, nor was their creation the turning point of the Seven Years' War, they do constitute a significant part of the history of that conflict. Rogers' Rangers gathered intelligence and confronted enemy irregulars when no one else would do it. They were colonists, New Englanders, and former provincial soldiers and they fought better in the wilderness than any trained British soldier could. They performed scouting missions on their own and fought alongside their British allies in decisive battles. Rogers' Rangers were an irregular colonial force who were vital to the cause of the regular British army.

If the history of the Seven Years' War in North America is only important for its influence on the American Revolution, then Rogers' Rangers are part of that influence. A number of ranger officers became leaders in George Washington's army, including General John Stark, Brigadier General Moses Hazen, General Seth Pomeroy, and General Israel Putnam. The Queen's Rangers participated in the American Revolution on the British side and Rogers himself commanded them for a time. Other rangers brought the common experience of fighting in the Seven Years' War and witnessing the contempt that the British held for provincials back home with them to New England. This common experience convinced many colonists to fight against the British or support the rebel cause in some other way. Finally, irregular tactics similar to those used by Rogers' Rangers were employed by rebel

soldiers in many battles and skirmishes throughout the American Revolution.

The Seven Years' War in North America did influence the coming of the American Revolution, but it was important in other ways. It rid the continent of French imperial presence and gave Great Britain control over the Great Lakes region and all western territory. Great Britain became the new trading partner with many Indian nations as it set up forts and trading posts further west. The Seven Years' War freed Englishmen from having to confront other Europeans on their own lands, and Rogers' Rangers were part of the fighting force that allowed this to happen. Those who choose to ignore Rogers' Rangers or dismiss them simply as Indian killers fail to understand their purpose and accomplishments. These men put the British army in touch with irregular warfare, fought against Native Americans using their own methods, and gave colonial soldiers the only favorable reputation they ever enjoyed. As much as British commanders criticized and distrusted Rogers' Rangers, they could only admit to how crucial they were to the war effort. By the time British generals finally decided to replace them, Rogers' Rangers had already provided the most valuable service of any irregular unit during the conflict. Rogers' Rangers were not a typical military unit; they were unique and unconventional, and it is only fair to judge them as such.

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